

## **Bimbé History**

In early 1969, a group of African-American students from Duke University, North Carolina College at Durham, now North Carolina Central University (NCCU), and a host of community members met to plan a cultural arts festival for the residents of Durham. After months of planning, the first Bimbé Cultural Arts Festival was held in Duke Gardens.

The Bimbé Cultural Arts Festival was established in honor of the West African festival of harvest and celebration. After the season of harvest, entire villages would gather to give thanks through dance, praise and feasting. The hallmark of the festival is the spirit of sharing as each family or tribe shares its best fruits with the entire village. This tradition continues to be practiced in many villages throughout the Caribbean. It is from the Caribbean that Bimbé came to Durham through the leadership and inspiration of Gaberth St. John, a native of St. Thomas. A key feature of the early Bimbé Festivals was St. John's drumming and the dancing of young people from Hayti, who usually performed the closing ceremonies by candle light.

Bimbé moved from the Duke Gardens to Hillside Park the following year. The move generated greater involvement of the community both in sponsorship and participation at the festival. Because of the growth, Durham Parks and Recreation (DPR) agreed to take the lead in planning the festival.

In 1973, Bimbé became a two-day festival with a much larger program and the addition of informational booths from various community organizations. The two-day celebration included performances in gospel, dance, blues, jazz and popular music.

In 1981, the Bimbé Cultural Arts Festival moved to the campus of NCCU. With increased sponsorship the festival had grown in size, attendance and diversity. In 1995, the festival moved from NCCU to UDI Industrial Park, located at the intersection of Fayetteville Street and Fayetteville Road. In 1996 the festival moved to the Durham Athletic Park.

With a focus on bringing the festival downtown, in 2003 the City's Office of Economic and Employment Development, now called the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, planned Bimbé. In 2007, Durham Parks and Recreation was given the directive to continue the tradition by hosting the festival. The event is now held at the CCB Plaza in downtown Durham and promises to be a day filled with the tradition of sharing, celebration and appreciation of gifts of talent. Bring your family and friends and help us continue to make history!